

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ADDIS 01418 061433Z

43

ACTION AF-18

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NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 SAM-01 OMB-01 AID-20 FEA-02 EB-11 COME-00

TRSE-00 CIEP-02 SIL-01 LAB-06 IO-14 DRC-01 CU-04

NEA-11 /170 W

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

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INFO AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMCONSUL ASMARA

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 1418

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ECON, SGEN, ET

SUBJECT: THE PUBLIC MOOD

REFS: (A) ADDIS 121 OF '73; (B) ADDIS 14321 OF '73;
(C) ADDIS A-165 OF 8/73; (D) ADDIS A-135 OF 7/73

1. SUMMARY: IN RECENT WEEKS PUBLIC MOOD HAS SEEMED MORE DEPRESSED THAN USUAL. HOWEVER, THERE NO RPT NO INDICATION MALAISE YET REACHING LEVELS SO AS SERIOUSLY UNDERMINE STABILITY OF COUNTRY OR REGIME. REFLECTING WIDESPREAD URBAN CONCERN, LOWER HOUSE PARLIAMENT HAS SHARPLY CRITICIZED ADMINISTRATION FOR INADEQUATE ENFORCEMENT PRICE CONTROLS AND HAS PASSED RESOLUTION CALLING FOR ELIMINATION RECENT GASOLINE PRICE HIKE. LARGELY RELATED TO HIGHER COST OF LIVING, POTENTIAL FOR LABOR PROBLEMS GREATER THAN NORMAL. BESIDES PRICE ISSUES, URBAN PUBLIC SEEMS SOMEWHAT DISTURBED BY CROWN PRINCE'S FAILURE RETURN; BY SHORTCOMINGS OF IEG IN FACE INCREASED POLITICO-MILITARY PROBLEMS IN ERITREA AND OGADEN; AND BY REPORTS DROUGHT AREA EXPANDING. EDUCATED ELITE INCLUDING CIVIL SERVANTS AS WELL AS YOUNGER MILITARY OFFICERS

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PAGE 02 ADDIS 01418 061433Z

(MANY OF WHOM SYMPATHIZED WITH ENLISTED MUTINEERS AT NEGELLI)

SEEM MORE FREQUENTLY EXPRESS UNCERTAINTY RE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, PARTICULARLY IN CONNECTION DROUGHT RELIEF AND APPARENT FLUX IN ETHIOPIAN FOREIGN POLICY. END SUMMARY.

2. IN WHAT MAY BE DELAYED REACTION, TRIGGERED BY RECENT HIKE IN FUEL PRICES (CF. ADDIS 430), TO SHARP GENERAL PRICE INCREASES IN FIRST HALF 1973, MONETIZED SECTOR SOCIETY SEEMS BE MORE AWARE AND CRITICAL OF INFLATION. ALTHOUGH EXECUTIVE BRANCH REPORTEDLY TRIED PREVENT PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON HIGHER PRICES, ELECTED LOWER HOUSE MEMBERS BEGAN HEATEDLY DISCUSSING THIS MATTER LAST WEEK. IN STRONGER MANNER THAN TYPICAL, LOWER HOUSE QUESTIONED RATIONALE FOR HIGHER FUEL PRICES AND CRITICIZED ADMINISTRATION FOR FAILURE CONTROL PRICE LEVELS. UNSOOTHED BY COMMERCE MINISTER'S EXPLANATIONS AND EXCUSES, LOWER HOUSE ON JANUARY 31 VOTED RESOLUTION CALLING ON ADMINISTRATION TO REDUCE PETROL PRICES TO 1973 LEVELS. COMPLAINING THAT PRICES BASIC COMMODITIES UNREASONABLY INFLATED BY GOUGERS, PARLIAMENTARIANS VOTED ON FEBRUARY 4 TO ESTABLISH SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE RETAIL PRICES. IEG IS PUBLICLY WARNING BUSINESS FIRMS NOT TO INFLATE PRICES BUT ADMITTING IT CANNOT POLICE THEM.

3. IN RELATED DEVELOPMENT, LABOR SCENE ALSO RESTIVE. LARGE NUMBER WORKER-INITIATED NEGOTIATIONS IN PROGRESS IN RESPONSE HIGHER COST OF LIVING. TRUCKERS UNHAPPY ABOUT IEG ATTEMPTS RESTRAIN TRANSPORT RATES, ALREADY HIGH DUE SCARCITY OF TRUCKS (CF. ASMARA 062). TEACHERS ASSOCIATION REPORTEDLY THREATENING COUNTRY-WIDE STRIKE FOR HIGHER WAGES AND *ETTER ADMINISTRATIVE CONDITIONS AND IN OPPOSITION TO EDUCATION SECTOR REVIEW PROPOSALS. GOVERNMENT SAID BE CONCERNED RE CURRENT POTENTIAL FOR LABOR DISPUTES.

4. SPOT INTERVIEWS AT ADDIS BUS DEPOT BY LOCAL EMPLOYEE INDICATE THAT TOWN AND VILLAGE DWELLERS IN COUNTRYSIDE ALSO COMPLAINING MORE THAN USUAL ABOUT INCREASING PRICES. (FOR EXAMPLE, FIELD SAMPLING EFFORT REVEALED THAT BASIC COMMODITIES IN MAKELLE, TIGRE RETAILING AN AVERAGE 70 PERCENT HIGHER THAN ONE YEAR AGO).

5. WHILE MAJORITY ETHIOPIANS ARE SUBSISTENCE FARMERS AND ONLY MARGINALLY AFFECTED BY PRICE INCREASES, SPREADING DROUGHT-CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ADDIS 01418 061433Z

RELATED PROBLEMS CAUSING DISLOCATION, SUFFERING AND CONFUSION IN MANY PARTS COUNTRY.

6. STUDENT SCENE REMAINS UNEASY. THERE HAVE BEEN STUDENT/ POLICE CLASHES IN ADDIS AND PROVINCES INCLUDING SOME IN WHICH POLICE REPORTEDLY FIRED THEIR WEAPONS AND STUDENTS HURT. THERE NOW POSSIBILITY STUDENTS MAY ALSO DEMONSTRATE ON BEHALF "ECONOMICALLY SQUEEZED" PUBLIC. QUESTION OF STUDENT GOVERNMENT AT

HSIU AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS (REF B) STILL UNRESOLVED AS SECOND SEMESTER BEGINS.

7. ALTHOUGH LESS SPECIFIC AND DEFINABLE THAN SOME ASPECTS PUBLIC MALAISE DESCRIBED ABOVE, IT OUR IMPRESSION THAT INFORMED CITIZENS, INCLUDING MILITARY OFFICERS, GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC CORPORATION EMPLOYEES, TENDING MORE OPENLY QUESTION IEG POLICIES OR PERHAPS MORE ACCURATELY THE LACK OF CLEAR POLICIES AND DECISIONS, PARTICULARLY BY PRIMIN AND COUNCIL OF MINISTERS. EDUCATED ELITE EXPRESSING GREATER SCEPTICISM THAT REGIME ABLE OR WILLING DEAL WITH PROBLEMS, E.G., FAMINE; RESOLVE LARGE NUMBER DECISIONS PENDING RE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY; AND IMPLEMENT IEG-SPONSORED REFORMS, E.G., LAND TENURE SYSTEM, JUDICIARY, LOCAL GOVERNMENT. EDUCATED ELITE SEE CONTROL AT TOP UNCERTAIN AND INDECISIVE AS INFLUENTIAL GROUPS NEGLECT THE PUBLIC BUSINESS TO STEP UP THEIR CAMPAIGNS FOR POWER BEHIND A RULER VIEWED INCREASINGLY SELECTIVE IN EXERCISING HIS AUTHORITY. FOREIGN CRITICISM OF ETHIOPIA'S HANDLING OF DROUGHT AND UNCERTAINTY OVER ETHIOPIA'S FOREIGN POLICY DIRECTIONS, PARTICULARLY "LOSS OF US AS PROTECTOR", ALSO TAKING TOLL ON THIS NORMALLY SELF-CONFIDENT GROUP.

8. BESIDES SHARING PARA 7 CONCERNS, YOUNGER, EDUCATED MILITARY OFFICERS SEEM MORE DISCONTENTED THAN USUAL WITH MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT AND ITS SLOW RESPONSE TO GRIEVANCES, INCLUDING THOSE UNDERLYING NEGELLI MUTINY (CF IR 6-830-014-74 AND REF D).

9. URBAN PUBLIC ALSO CONFUSED AND DISTURBED BY FAILURE CROWN PRINCE RETURN ALTHOUGH LOCAL PRESS LONG AGO REPORTED HE FULLY RECOVERED; BY REPORTS OF DISCONTENT IN MILITARY FORCES PARTICULARLY RELATED UNRELIEVED HARSH LIVING CONDITIONS OF TROOPS DEPLOYED INTO OGADEN YEAR AGO; BY GROWING INSURGENCY RELATED PROBLEMS IN ERITREA AND CONCERNS OF SENIOR OFFICIALS RE SOMALIA; BY SUDDEN BREAK WITH ISRAEL; AND BY PHASE-DOWN OF KAGNEW.
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PAGE 04 ADDIS 01418 061433Z

10. COMMENT:HMSHOULD BE NOTED THAT ASSESSING PUBLIC OPINION IN ETHIOPIA PARTICULARLY SPECULATIVE DUE SOCIO-POLITICAL NATURE SOCIETY AND TIGHT IEG CONTROL ON MEDIA, ETC. WE DO NOT RIT NOT YET CONSIDER CURRENT PUBLIC MOOD BE CRITICAL THREAT TO PUBLIC ORDER. HOWEVER, MALAISE EXPECTED AFFECT URBAN AND EDUCATED POPULACE FOR SOME TIME AND C ULD GROW.
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